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MAGIC AND WITCHCRAFT IN TERRY PRATCHETT'S DISCWORLD'S THE WITCHES NOVELS**MAGIA E BRUXARIA NOS ROMANCES DE BRUXAS DA SÉRIE "DISCWORLD", DE TERRY PRATCHETT**

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Recebido em 01 mar 2016. Ana Rita Martins – Leitora de Inglês no Departamento de Estudos Anglisticos da Universidade de Lisboa (FLUL). Doutoranda em Literatura Inglesa Medieval em Inglês Médio (FLUL, 2011/2012-); Mestre em Literatura Inglesa Medieval (FLUL, 2010). Doutoranda no Centro de Estudos Anglisticos da Universidade de Lisboa (CEAUL/ULICES) e membro do Projeto Mensageiros das Estrelas. E-mail: anna.rita.mart@gmail.com

Aprovado em 27 mar 2016.

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Abstract: 'This is a story about magic and where it goes and perhaps more importantly where it comes from and why, although it doesn't pretend to answer all or any of these questions' (PRATCHETT, 1987, p.11).

Much beloved by audiences around the world Terry Pratchett is the creator of one of the most internationally acclaimed fantasy realms, the Discworld, 'a sight to be seen on no other world' (PRATCHETT, 1986, p.7). Carried through space on the backs of four elephants, which in turn stand on the shell of the Sky Turtle Great A'Tuin, the Discworld is inhabited by all sorts of magical creatures; it is also the only known world where the colour octarine might be seen (if one is a wizard or a cat) and the site of the twin-city Ankh-Morpork, acknowledged for its pride and pestilence.

In this study, I aim to explore what forms of magic are described on Pratchett's world, how they work, and seeing as 'Discworld runs on magic' (PRATCHETT; STEWART; COHEN, 2002, p.28) how magic is connected to its very existence. Special attention will be given to female magic, namely that of the Lancre Coven, which includes Magrat Garlick, Nanny Ogg, the late Granny Weatherwax as well as Agnes Nitt, and the Chalk witch Tiffany Aching, the "hag of the hill" and protagonist of Pratchett's last novel.

Keywords: Fantasy; Magic; Discworld; Pratchett; Witches.

Resumo: 'This is a story about magic and where it goes and perhaps more importantly where it comes from and why, although it doesn't pretend to answer all or any of these questions.' (PRATCHETT, 1987, p.11). Amado por leitores pelo mundo inteiro, Terry Pratchett é o criador de um dos mais aclamados reinos fantásticos, o Discworld, 'a sight to be seen on no other world' (PRATCHETT, 1986, p.7). Carregado através do espaço nas costas de quatro elefantes, os quais por sua vez estão em cima da carapaça da Grande Tartaruga A'Tuin, o Discworld é habitado por todos os tipos de criaturas mágicas; é o único mundo onde a cor octarina pode ser vista (por feiticeiros e gatos) e o local da cidade-gêmea Ankh-Morpork, conhecida pelo seu orgulho e pestilência.

O propósito deste estudo é explorar as formas de magia existentes no mundo de Pratchett, de que modo a magia funciona e, tendo em conta que o 'Discworld runs on magic' (PRATCHETT; STEWART; COHEN, 2002, p.28), como esta está ligada à sua existência. Irá ser dada particular atenção à magia praticada por mulheres, nomeadamente à irmandade das bruxas de Lancre, composta por Magrat Garlick, Nanny Ogg, a falecida Granny Weatherwax assim como Agnes Nitt, e à bruxa do Chalk Tiffany Aching, "hag of the hill" (bruxa da montanha) e protagonista do último livro do autor.

Palavras-Chave: Fantasia; Magia; Discworld; Pratchett; Bruxas.

PRATCHETT'S *DISC WORLD* SERIES

In the UK in 2001 it was roughly estimated that about 10% of all books sold belonged to the Fantasy genre of which around 10% had been written by Terry Pratchett. This implies that 1% of all Fantasy books purchased in Britain at the time were written by Pratchett (BUTLER, 2001, p.7), making him one of the best-selling British authors in the beginning of the twenty-first century. In 2015, when the last Discworld novel, *The Shepherd's Crown*, was published in the UK it reportedly sold 52,846 copies in three days (FLOOD, 2015). Perhaps this is why "for some time there has been a joke that no British railway train is allowed to depart unless at least one passenger is reading a Pratchett novel" (HUNT, 2003, p.91). Worldwide, according to The London Book Fair, Pratchett's fantasy novels, which have been translated into thirty-seven languages, stand at about 85 million copies sold (2014).

Of all the works written by Pratchett the internationally acclaimed *Discworld Series* are his largest collection, including

forty-one novels that take the reader on a journey across space on the back of the Great A'Tuin, the ten-thousand-mile-long sky turtle upon which four giant elephants stand. On top of them lies the Discworld, which might well be described as a flat planet:

Then it comes into view overhead, bigger than the biggest, most unpleasantly-armed starcruiser in the imagination of a three-ring film-maker: a turtle (...) It is Great A'Tuin, one of the rare astrochelonians from a universe where things are less as they are and more like people imagine them to be, and it carries on its meteor-pocked shell four giant elephants who bear on their enormous shoulders the great round wheel of the Discworld. (...) There are continents, archipelagos, seas, deserts, mountain ranges and even a tiny central ice cap. (...) Their world (...) is as round and flat as a geological pizza, although without the anchovies. (PRATCHETT, 1987, p.11-12)

However, despite its very horizontal shape, the Discworld bears a striking resemblance to Earth except that, as pointed out by Jacqueline Simpson, it has “an extra dimension of reality” (2008, p.XI). As a result, that which only exists in Human imagination on Earth is quite alive and well (and sometimes kicking) on the Discworld: from witches, wizards, and fairy godmothers to elves, picties, vampires, zombies, among many others – all inhabit the Disc, a world that runs on magic (PRATCHETT; STEWART; COHEN, 2002, p.28) so strong even stories become alive. Magic is a crucial part of the Discworld especially in the Witches novels, one of the major subsets of the Discworld novels in which this study will focus on.

Presently it is customary to divide Pratchett's *Discworld Series* into four broad subseries: the Rincewind novels, the Death novels,

the City Watch novels and the Witches novels. In addition, there are one-off narratives that are set on the Disc, like *Pyramids* (1989) and *Moving Pictures* (1990), but feature characters that only appear once throughout the whole series. The Witches novels, in which the Tiffany Aching subset will be included throughout this study, comprise eleven novels total – *Equal Rites* (1987), *Wyrd Sisters* (1988), *Witches Abroad* (1991), *Lords and Ladies* (1992), *Maskerade* (1995), *Carpe Jugulum* (1998), *The Wee Free Men* (2003, Tiffany Aching series), *A Hat Full of Sky* (2004, Tiffany Aching series), *Wintersmith* (2006, Tiffany Aching series), *I Shall Wear Midnight* (2010, Tiffany Aching series), and *The Shepherd's Crown* (2015, Tiffany Aching series) – and one short story, “The Sea and Little Fishes” (1998).

In all of them, magic and witchcraft emerge as a narrative force to be reckoned with, interfering more or less directly in the characters' adventures. What is magic like on Pratchett's world, though? What energies can their users conjure? These will be some of the questions this essay will address. Special attention will be given to the witches themselves, namely those of the Lancre Coven composed of the young Magrat Garlick, the motherly Gytha “Nanny” Ogg, and the most powerful Esmeralda “Granny” Weatherwax as well as split-personality witch Agnes Nitt (or Perdita, depending on the day one meets her) and the Chalk's witch Tiffany Aching, the “hag of the hill” and protagonist of *The Shepherd's Crown*.

“THERE IS MAGIC AND THEN AGAIN THERE IS MAGIC”: MAGIC AND WITCHCRAFT ON DISCWORLD

Magic seems to be an ever-present force throughout Humankind's history, so much so that even in today's world, where more and more

Man relies on science to understand and explain their surroundings, its presence lingers on in our collective imaginary. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)*, the word magic has three main possible meanings:

1. of events or to manipulate the natural world, usually involving the use of an occult or secret body of knowledge (...);
2. An inexplicable and remarkable influence producing surprising results; an enchanting or mystical quality; glamour, appeal (...);
3. The art of producing (by sleight of hand, optical illusion etc.) apparently inexplicable phenomena; conjuring. (2015)

Interestingly all three definitions seem to have a common thread: magic is some sort of force/influence/art able to produce extraordinary or super-natural results. Furthermore, even though “with the spread of rationalistic and scientific explanations of the natural world in the West, the status of magic has declined” (OED, 2015), representations of it can be found in nearly all art forms around the world. However, in no other field is magic as pervasive as in the Fantasy genre. Magic seems to have become a nearly mandatory motif for most Fantasy fiction, having been further popularised through the works of commercially-successful authors, such as J.R.R. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings*, C.S. Lewis’ *Chronicles of Narnia*, Ursula Le Guin’s *Earthsea* collection, J.K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* novels and even in the more recent *A Song of Ice and Fire* series by George R. R. Martin, to name but a few.

Curiously, its representation, i.e., how magic works in each of these imaginary worlds is certainly not the same; perhaps for that reason in the *Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, Diana Wynne Jones highlights

that “notions of magic differ slightly from writer to writer”, and although “when present, [it] can do almost anything”, magic must follow “certain rules according to its nature” (1997). Therefore,

in the more generalized field of fantasy there is a huge, tangled complex of ideas concerning magic and magical practices; many varieties of magic are depicted, several of which tend to occur together, and all of which tend to melt into one another (JONES, 1997).

In Terry Pratchett’s *Discworld Series* magic not only obeys certain rules but also can be measured at its most basic level, it consists of “thaums” defined in *The New Discworld Companion* as:

The basic and traditional unit of magical strength. It has been universally established as the amount of magic needed to create one small white pigeon or three normal-sized billiard balls (a smaller measure for purposes of calculation is the millithaum). A thaumometer is used to measure the density of a magical field. It is a dark blue glass cube, with a dial on the front and a button on the side. (PRATCHETT; BRIGGS, 2004, p. 376)

Using a very scientific-inspired account since ‘the Discworld is, more than anything else, is... logical. Relentlessly, solidly logical’ although ‘it is logical about the wrong things’ (PRATCHETT, 2000, p.160), Pratchett and Briggs add that every thaum, much like every atom, is composed of smaller particles called resons (literally thing-ies or reality fragments). These in turn are made up of a minimum of five flavours: “‘up’, ‘down’, ‘sideways’, ‘sex appeal’ and ‘peppermint’” (PRATCHETT; BRIGGS, 2004, p.376). Thus, magic can be found everywhere on the Disc, it is part of the very fabric of

reality, holding this world as one while it plunges through space, as the author describes: 'Magic glues the Discworld together – magic generated by the turning of the world itself, magic wound like silk out of the underlying structure of existence to suture the wounds of reality' (PRATCHETT, 1989, p.6).

In addition, there are at least three different types of magic on the Disc: intrinsic, residual and induced. Intrinsic magic seems to derive from the Discworld's very nature, it is made of fragments, like thaums, and can (in a pseudoscientific manner) be quantified: 'it is the intrinsic magic of Discworld which, for example, is responsible for the slowing-down of light but at the same time makes it possible to see light coming' (PRATCHETT; BRIGGS, 2004, p.270). Residual magic is powerful and unpredictable; it is a form of magic accidentally imprinted on some areas of the Disc, like the Wyrmsberg, by the great sorcerers who waged war against each other. Wizards or witches may exploit this kind of magic as a source of magical energy, but because it is so hard to control its use can be fatal.

Finally, induced magic is connected to the power of a story or narrative; it is 'an often neglected but very powerful form, and available for use even by non-practitioners. It is the magic potential created in an object, or even a living creature, by usage and belief' (PRATCHETT; BRIGGS, 2004, p. 272). Due to induced magic, words gain real power on the Discworld making it possible to transform someone (or something) psychologically without actually transforming them physically, which is why:

Despite many threats, Granny Weatherwax had never turned anyone into a frog. The way she saw it, there was a technically less cruel but

cheaper and much more satisfying thing you could do. You could leave them human and make them think they were a frog, which also provided much innocent entertainment for passers-by. (PRATCHETT, 1992, p.156)

As a result, belief and reality seem to merge on the Disc, which means that hanging an iron horseshoe over the door, for instance, is not mere folk superstition but has actual consequences when warding off an elves' invasions since its magnetic force can affect an elf's well-being by disturbing its sixth sense (PRATCHETT; SIMPSON, 2008, p.198). Similarly, because on Discworld believing is seeing, some characters exist only out of the sheer power of belief, such as Death, a grim-reaper like figure that personifies the end of life but who, as shown on *Hogfather* (1996), can only travel to where people actually believe in death. The power of belief, of stories, or induced magic also seems to be somehow associated with another magical force on the Disc: *narrativium*.

Narrativium is a crucially important element when trying to understand how Pratchett's world and the magic within it work given that stories and beliefs drive and support its reality. Broadly speaking, *narrativium* helps make stories hang together, ensuring that everyone obeys the narrative imperative or the power of story, i.e., it guarantees characters act in accordance to already established narratives that have grown powerful out of being repeated and believed in for generations. Consequently,

On Discworld, things happen because people expect them to. (...) On Discworld, the eighth son of an eighth son must become a wizard. There's no escaping the power of story: the outcome is

inevitable. Even if, as in *Equal Rites*, the eighth son of an eighth son is a girl. Great A'Tuin the turtle must swim through space with four elephants on its back and the entire Discworld on top of them, because that's what a world-bearing turtle has to do. The narrative structure demands it. (PRATCHETT; STEWART; COHEN, 2002, p.28-29)

Terry Pratchett's book *Witches Abroad* is particularly interesting in its depiction of how narrative structures influence not only the characters in the story, but also people's lives. In this novel stories shape (or at least try to shape) how characters behave and progress throughout the storyline whilst the author highlights that 'people think that stories are shaped by people' when 'it's the other way around. Stories exist independently of their players' (PRATCHETT, 1992, p.8). *Witches Abroad* is about the power of stories and how they seem to have a life of their own – an idea supported by Pratchett who describes stories as 'a parasitical life form, warping lives in the service only of the story itself' (PRATCHETT, 1992, p.9). Stories are selfish in their workings; they 'don't care who takes part in them. All that matters is that the story gets told, that the story repeats' (PRATCHETT, 1992, p.9); the more a story is retold, it is implied, the more powerful it becomes:

Stories, great flapping ribbons of shaped space-time, have been blowing and uncoiling since the beginning of time. And they have evolved. The weakest have died and the strongest have survived and they have grown fat on the retelling... stories, twisting and blowing through the darkness. (PRATCHETT, 1992, p.8)

Seeing as stories have and can take a very specific shape on the Disc, they are also responsible for how a part of Pratchett's underlying magic works. For instance, Magrat Garlick has a reputation for being a good healer due to her knowledge of herbs, but Granny Weatherwax is known to be great healer because she can tell stories people believe in. Granny often supplies village dwellers that have fallen ill with a bottle of coloured water, convincing them it will work like a charm, which it does because they believe in it. The same happens with a great amount of a witch's magic, in *Equal Rites* it is implied that Nanny Annaple holds greater 'crone-credibility' (PRATCHETT, 1987, p.198) and respect than Granny Weatherwax simply because she has a face full of warts and no teeth. Although Granny is identified as the greatest witch since Black Aliss, Nanny Annaple's looks add to her power since they match those of the old wicked, powerful witches of children's fairy tales.

As a result, appearances matter to magic users on the Disc since the narrative imperative gives them power, enabling them to perform some kinds of magic, a fact that serves to explain why both witches and wizards strive to look as people expect them to. It also justifies why witches must wear pointy hats:

It was a typical witch's hat. Granny always wore it when she went into the village, but in the forest she just wore a leather hood. (...) Magic can be something right in the wrong place, or something wrong in the right place. It can be – (...) 'It's a witch's hat because you wear it. But you're a witch because you wear the hat. Um.'

'So –' prompted Granny.

‘So people see you coming in the hat and the cloak and they know you’re a witch and that’s why your magic works?’ said Esk.

‘That’s right,’ said Granny. ‘It’s called headology.’ (PRATCHETT, 1987, p.61-62)

Headology is yet another very unique form of magic on the Disc, its very existence suggests that by manipulating stories and their power one can influence reality itself. As quoted above, Granny Weatherwax’s witching powers derive at least in part from the fact that others identify her as a witch. Without her hat, Granny would be unable to make the villagers who live in her stead believe in her magic so even though she does have magical abilities, it is implied her power would dwindle due to the lack of belief. This idea is reinforced throughout several of the books that compose the Witches novels, including the last, *The Shepherd’s Crown*, where young witch Tiffany Aching recalls, ‘To someone in need, someone punched so far down that it seemed there was no way of getting up again, well, a witch with the right look could make all the difference. It helped them to *believe*’ (PRATCHETT, 2015, p.182). Pratchett thus builds a world where magic takes on many shapes and works in very peculiar ways: magic exists both as an element linked to the Discworld’s nature, ergo it is very real, but also as an indirect force, influencing and changing the characters simply because they believe it will. One may then suppose that, in part, magic endures on the Disc on account of people’s belief while at the same time that very same belief is what allows magic to prevail. Despite the diverse forms magic takes on Pratchett’s world, White and Black magic, two of its oldest categories, do not exist:

There is no Discworld concept of white/black magic. There is simply magic, in whatever form, which may be used in whatever way the user decides. Suggesting that there is any type of magic that is intrinsically good or bad would make as much sense to a Discworld wizard as suggesting that there is good and bad gravity. (PRATCHETT; BRIGGS, 2004, p. 276)

Although to consider the whole history of magic would be too great an ambition for the current study, the presence of White and Black magic does seem pervasive in Western imagination, especially since the Middle Ages, a period which has often served as a source of inspiration for the Fantasy genre. According to Jacques Le Goff, by the twelfth and thirteenth centuries the supernatural phenomena in the West had already been divided into three adjectives: *mirabilis*, *magicus*, and *miraculosus* (1992, p.30). For this paper, *magicus* (magic or magical) is the most relevant expression signifying “in theory a neutral term, for there was both black magic, influenced by the devil, and white magic, which was considered legitimate” (LE GOFF, 1992, p.30). This definition is interesting because it confirms that from early on there has been a dividing line between good magic, i.e., White, and corrupt magic, i.e., Black. Furthermore, each of these forms of magic were associated with a gender so while wizards, like Merlin and his modern successors such as Gandalf, were men and tended to practice good, White magic, witches, like Morgan le Fay, were women often linked to a darker kind of magic: witchcraft.

Defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as “the practices of a witch or witches; the exercise of supernatural power supposed

to be possessed by persons in league with the devil or evil spirits” (Def. 1a, 2015), witchcraft gave/gives women access to power that could/can press the unwilling into its service. Considering that in medieval Europe women were regarded as inferior beings whose physical and mental weakness made them particularly attractive preys to Satan himself, it comes as no surprise that the figure of the witch came to stand as a threat to the ruling male power. Perhaps that is why by the fifteenth century there were manuals, like the (in)famous *Malleus Maleficarum* (*The Hammer of Witches*, 1486), destined to identify and punish witches.

These are relevant points to take into account when looking at Pratchett’s depiction of magic and its users because the author seemed bent on revoking these old associations. In a talk entitled “Why Gandalf Never Married”, originally delivered as a speech at Novacon in 1985, Pratchett tackled some of the historically inherited differences between wizards and witches. During his lecture, the author highlighted how much modern Fantasy fiction still perceives male and female use of magic differently, stating:

Let’s talk about wizards and witches. There is a tendency to talk of them in one breath, as though they were simply different sexual labels for the same job. It isn’t true. In the fantasy world there is no such thing as a male witch. Warlocks, I hear you cry, but it’s true. (...) There certainly isn’t such a thing as a female wizard.

Sorceress? Just a better class of witch. Enchantress? Just a witch with good legs. The fantasy world, in fact, is overdue for a visit from the Equal Opportunities people because, in the fantasy world, magic done by women is usually of poor quality,

third-rate, negative stuff, while the wizards are usually cerebral, clever, powerful, and wise.

Strangely enough, that's also the case in this world. You don't have to believe in magic to notice that.

Wizards get to do a better class of magic, while witches give you warts. (PRATCHETT, 1987)

In what Pratchett calls the “consensus fantasy universe” (1987), which ultimately “represents a mash-up of canonical fantasy worlds” (SINCLAIR, 2015, p.8), certain plot items have become public domain. As a result, when reading or watching Fantasy fiction, audiences expect worlds full of dragons, wizards, elves, dwarves, magical objects, and quests – motifs that have become clichés in modern fantasy and form ‘mosaics of every fantasy story you’ve ever read’ (PRATCHETT, 1987). However, although Pratchett recognises the importance of these canonical worlds and their authors, he is also critical about how women’s magic is depicted in these very same works. The author persistently draws one’s attention to this subject throughout most of the speech, recalling

the true fairytale witches, as malevolent a bunch of crones as you could imagine. It was probably living in those gingerbread cottages. No wonder witches were always portrayed as toothless - it was living in a 90,000-calorie house that did it. You’d hear a noise in the night and it’d be the local kids, eating the doorknob. According to my eight-year-old daughter’s book on *Wizards*, a nicely-illustrated little paperback available at any good bookshop, ‘wizards undid the harm caused by evil witches’. There it is again, the recurrent message: female magic is cheap and nasty. (PRATCHETT, 1987)

Pratchett resorts to well-known references to the German fairy tale “Hansel and Gretel”, recorded by the Brothers Grimm and first published in 1812, to clarify why witches often look old and toothless. The author makes use of the same fairy tale in the novel *Witches Abroad* where the story of Black Aliss, the witch who lived in a gingerbread house, is partially remembered by Granny, Nanny and Magrat as well as the “two children [that] shut her up in her own oven” (PRATCHETT, 1992, p.114). The tone of the conversation is sad since Black Aliss is described as merely having become eccentric in her old age, and the rumours about her cannibalism revealed untrue. Stories are to blame for Black Aliss’ demise suggesting that an old woman living alone in a secluded house, whether made of gingerbread or not, is destined to be considered a wicked witch because:

‘That’s what happens,’ said Granny. ‘You get too involved with stories, you get confused. You don’t know what’s really real and what isn’t. And they get you in the end. They send you weird in the head. I don’t like stories. They’re not real. I don’t like things that ain’t real.’ (PRATCHETT, 1992, p.114)

Nonetheless, stories are real on the Disc where *narrativium* is always at work: if a young girl finds a spinning wheel, she will prick her finger and fall asleep, after all ‘a story, once started, *takes a shape*. It picks up the vibrations of all the other workings of that story that have ever been’ (PRATCHETT, 1992, p.8).

Pratchett thus retells familiar stories, whether they are fairy tales or a part of folklore, and deconstructs them in order to show how women’s magic was and often still is misunderstood, misjudged and/or underestimated. By removing the concept of White and Black magic, Pratchett seeks to limit the association of wizard magic

with Good and witch magic with Evil. In fact, although there are some exceptions like Lily Weatherwax, on the Disc witch magic is most often described in a positive manner, especially the actions of the Lancre Coven.

Located in the Ramtop Mountains, which supply the Disc with most of its witches and wizards (PRATCHETT, 1989, p.6), Lancre is a small kingdom that encompasses several settlements, more significantly it is home to three of Pratchett's most popular witches: Magrat Garlick, Nanny Ogg, and Granny Weatherwax – an unusual trio chiefly because:

Your average witch is not, by nature, a social animal as far as other witches are concerned. There's a conflict of dominant personalities. There's a group of ringleaders without a ring. There's the basic unwritten rule of witchcraft, which is 'Don't do what you will, do what I say.' The natural size of a coven is one. (PRATCHETT, 1992, p.19)

Indeed witches only spend time together when they cannot avoid it – a fact that makes the friendship of the three Lancre witches rather odd; they even engage in sabbats, except without the dancing, '[o]r singing or getting over-excited or all that messing about with ointments and similar' (PRATCHETT, 1989, p.9). Furthermore, they are *wyrd* sisters much like the three weird witches in Shakespeare's play *Macbeth* that seem to have served partly as inspiration for Pratchett's coven. The Anglo-Norman word *wyrd*, i.e., Fate or Destiny, indicates the three witches might be linked to the three Fates of Greek mythology as well as to the Sudice and the Norns of Slavic and Norse mythology respectively. All these myths refer to three women, usually depicted as goddesses

of destiny, who are responsible for weaving the fate of Mankind. In this context, the number three is equally relevant; it is not only 'an important number for stories. Three wishes, three princes, three billy goats, three guesses... three witches' (PRATCHETT, 1992, p.62), but also has religious and cultural meaning since many religions worldwide contain triple deities. In Christian religion too the number three has great importance, especially considering the three entities of the Holy Trinity. In addition, a coven having three witches is not enough since, as described in *Maskerade*, it must be the right kind of three:

(...) while three was a good number for witches... it had to be the right sort of three. The right sort of... *types*. (...)

As a witch, she [Nanny Ogg] naturally didn't believe in any occult nonsense of any sort. But there were one or two truths down below the bedrock of the soul which had to be faced, and right among them was this business of, well, of the maiden, the mother and... the other one. (...)

(...) it was an old superstition – older than books, older than writing – and beliefs like that were heavy weights on the rubber sheet of human experience, tending to pull people into their orbit. (PRATCHETT, 1996, p.12-13)

In what is clearly a reinterpretation of the Triple Goddess myth described by the poet Robert Graves in *The White Goddess* (1948), the witches in Pratchett's coven personify the three aspects of the Great Mother Goddess: the Maiden, the Mother and the Crone.

Magrat, the youngest of the coven, is introduced into the story as an apprentice witch, representing in *Wyrd Sisters* and *Witches*

Abroad the Maiden; she relies heavily on talismans as well as books and believes 'in Nature's wisdom and elves and the healing power of colours and the cycle of the seasons and a lot of other things Granny Weatherwax didn't have any truck with' (PRATCHETT, 1989, p.31). Magrat is a 'relentless doer of good works. A worrier' with 'a slightly watery-eyed expression of hopeless goodwill wedged between a body like a maypole and hair like a haystack after a gale' (PRATCHETT, 1992, p.22).

Nanny Ogg, on the other hand, is an older, more experienced witch; she has been married three times, has spawn fifteen children, and has many grandchildren and great-grandchildren, making her the matriarch of the Ogg Clan and the 'undisputed tyrant of half the Ramtops' (PRATCHETT, 1996, p. 192). Because of her extensive family Nanny represents, in a very literal sense, the Mother: 'Nanny was someone's mum. It was written all over her' (PRATCHETT, 1999, p.131), but most significantly she fits the role of the Mother due to her ability to make people feel at home. On account of that, it is to Nanny that most inhabitants of the Ramtops turn when a woman is about to give birth. On the contrary, when death is impending, it is Granny Weatherwax who is called, taking on the role of the Crone. Granny is the most powerful and respected witch on the Disc; she is a master at Headology and Borrowing, meaning she can take control over the minds of animals, including bees, which were thought impossible to Borrow, and experience the world through their minds and bodies. Granny is also 'the most highly-regarded of the leaders they [the witches] didn't have' (PRATCHETT, 1989, p.8). Therefore, Magrat, Nanny and Granny seem to be a seamless embodiment of the Triple Goddess, yet, like nearly all Pratchett

reinterpretations, the witches of the Lancre coven soon subvert the tripartite nature of the Great Goddess myth and become four (or five depending on how you calculate it).

The witch Agnes Nitt is introduced in the novel *Lords and Ladies* where she plays a minor part but shows sufficient talent to allow Nanny to spot her. As a result, after Magrat marries King Verence II, leaving the role of the Maiden and apparently retiring as a witch, Agnes reluctantly takes up her place, except she is not alone. Agnes has a split personality: inside her is a thin mean girl called Perdita,

She wasn't sure how she'd acquired the invisible passenger. Her mother had told her that when she was small she'd been in the habit of blaming accidents and mysteries (...) on 'the other little girl'. (...) Agnes disliked Perdita, who was vain, selfish and vicious, and Perdita hated going around inside Agnes, whom she regarded as a fat, pathetic, weak-willed blob that people would walk all over were she not so steep. (PRATCHETT, 1999, p.18)

Having 'two minds about anything' (PRATCHETT, 1999, p.17) has its advantages, especially when fighting against an elf's mental assault. So while Agnes settles into her part as the Maiden, Magrat has her first daughter, which, along with Granny Weatherwax stepping down during the events of *Carpe Jugulum*, comes to disrupt the coven's tripartite nature pushing Magrat to the role of the Mother and Nanny to that of the Crone, roles that ultimately are not suitable for them. Magrat is now a mother but she lacks experience and maturity while Nanny, because of her motherly nature, does not have the temper to impersonate a hag. On a closer look even Agnes herself seems to barely fit into the Maiden role,

since even though she is technically a maiden, her other inner self, Perdita, is far from having a maiden's personality.

By creating a rift between the roles expected of each character, Pratchett reinforces the notion that stories have power over lives and unfavorably comments on how people may find themselves acting out parts they do not fit into. Agnes, Magrat, Nanny, and Granny might be willing to fulfill some of the roles others expect of them, but they refuse to obey the power of *narrativium* showing to prove that a witch's power derives from knowing when to abide by the story (in this case the Triple Goddess myth) and when to break free from it. According to Janet Brennan Croft, "[i]n the dissonance between the archetypal roles and the real people filling them, Pratchett again reinforces his message that stories cannot be allowed to dictate roles to people" (2008, p.154).

Nevertheless, as witches and a coven of four, Agnes, Nanny, Granny and Magrat, despite less so after her marriage, have duties towards the people who live in their steadings: they all assist in births as midwives, tend to the sick, and comfort the dying. On the Disc,

A witch stands on the very edge of everything, between the light and the dark, between life and death, making choices, making decisions so that others may pretend no decisions have even been needed. Sometimes they need to help some poor soul through the final hours, help them find the door, not to get lost in the dark. (PRATCHETT, 2015, p.36)

Nurturers of new life, but also bringers of death, witches serve as enforcers of justice as well, it is they who must 'Speak up for those who don't have voices' (PRATCHETT, 2004, p.43) and when

injustice happens, it is up to the local witch to ensure there is a reckoning and set the score right. Consequently, a witch must also bear the burden of making choices, of dealing with reality and give people not what they want, but what they need. In addition, witches must protect their lands against other supernatural forces or creatures, like vampires (*Carpe Jugulum*) or elves (*Lords and Ladies; The Wee Free Men; The Shepherd's Crown*) that sometimes seek to overpower their land. They guard the very borders of the Discworld's reality,

'We look to... the edges,' said Mistress Weatherwax. 'There's a lot of edge, more than people know. Between life and death, this world and the next, night and day, right and wrong... an' they need watchin'. We watch 'em, we guard the sum of things. And we never ask for any reward. That's important.'

'People gives us stuff, mind you. People can be very gen'rous to witches,' said Mrs Ogg, happily. (PRATCHETT, 2004, p.304)

A lesson young witches, like Tiffany Aching, must learn, as they too will have to hold the lines between the Disc and the many parallel worlds. Tiffany Aching is one of the youngest witches on the Disc and much like Granny Weatherwax, with whom she shares several personality traits, she has witching in her blood. Her grandmother Sarah "Granny" Aching is one of the very few witches to have lived in the Chalk, a land known for its dislike of witches, and although she never admitted to being one, she had wisdom, authority and a strong sense of justice – 'she saw to it that where there was injustice there would be a reckoning' (PRATCHETT; SIMPSON, 2008, p. 220). Granny Aching implicitly teaches Tiffany at a young age about a

witch's duties to her people and land so when she dies, it is Tiffany who must guard the Chalk.

Tiffany or 'Tir-far-thóinn', which in the old speech of the Nac Mac Feegle means 'land under wave' (PRATCHETT, 2004, p.138), has a unique connection to a clan of picties that live in the Chalk, the Wee Free Men, and to the land itself, which becomes the core of her power, 'I need to keep a piece of the Chalk with me, she realized. My land gives me strength, supports me. It reminds me who I am. (...) I am Tiffany Aching, witch of the Chalk. And I need my land with me' (PRATCHETT, 2015, p.241). She also possesses First Sight, i.e., the ability to see what is really there and not what the mind believes ought to be there, and Second Thoughts, defined as the thoughts one thinks about the way one thinks. Her talent and potential is so great that when Granny Weatherwax dies in the last Discworld novel, *The Shepherd's Crown*, leaving a mystical void on the Disc, Tiffany inherits her steadiness and her position as the witches' unofficial leader.

Tiffany Aching's novels, although often referred to as a separate subset from the Lancre coven series, seem to complement Pratchett's viewpoint about the witches' roles on the Disc. Her adventures to become a full witch help the reader understand how a witch should behave, what duties she has and what sacrifices must be made, as the author describes: 'It was never easy being a witch. Oh, the broomstick was great, but to be a witch you needed to be sensible, so sensible that sometimes it hurt. You dealt with the reality – not what people wanted' (PRATCHETT, 2015, p.87-88). Through Tiffany Aching's training, it becomes clear magic should not to be used at all times, instead it must be done scarcely since

witchcraft is about helping people. The same point is made when Granny Weatherwax trains Eskarina “Esk” Smith,

‘There’s magic,’ said Granny, ‘and then again, there’s magic. The important thing, my girl, is to know what magic is for and what it isn’t for. And you can take it from me, it was never intended for lighting fires, you can be absolutely certain of that. If the Creator had meant us to use magic for lighting fires, then he wouldn’t have given us – er, matches.’ (PRATCHETT, 1987, p. 44)

Since magic equals power and too much of it can make a witch cross to the dark side, a limited use of actual magic is a common feature of most good, powerful witches on the Disc. Granny Weatherwax opposes to the use of magic to help people, preferring Headology and hard work and the same applies to Granny Aching as well as to Tiffany. Wizards too tend to avoid doing magic, but more often because they are too lazy (BUTLER, 2007, p.422) and, unlike witches, less concerned about helping the common folk. The magic practiced by witches and wizards although not different in nature as they can all access the various forms of magic – intrinsic, residual or induced – is distinct in what concerns methodology, organisation and source of power, a topic that is especially dealt with in *Equal Rites*.

More than any other narrative in the Witches novels, *Equal Rites* focuses on how wizards and witches differ via the coming-of-age story of Esk Smith, the eight child of an eight son who is accidentally bequeathed wizard Drum Billet’s staff, even though she is a woman. Having a deep magical connection to the staff and the power it contains leads Esk on a journey that clearly serves to highlight how wizard and witch magic is done differently. Wizard magic on the Disc is described

as being all about words (PRATCHETT, 1987, p.206), especially those stored in books, and it is learnt at the Unseen University in Ankh-Morpork where boys who show remarkable magical talent go to receive their training. Witch magic, on the other hand, comes from the land, “from a zest for life, a clear-headed grasp of psychology, a gift for natural medicine, and an absolute refusal to be overawed by any situation” (PRATCHETT, 2000, p.162).

Witches do not attend any special school; instead mature witches take on gifted girls as apprentices who will inherit their steading when they die. As an apprentice a witch may have more than one teacher, like Tiffany Aching who at the age of eleven starts learning under Miss Level (*A Hat Full of Sky*) and two years later becomes Miss Treason’s student (*Wintersmith*). In addition, whereas wizards are a highly stratified group – there are eight grades of eight orders of wizardry, although a wizard can usually only move up a level by killing his predecessor –, witches do not care much about such trivialities:

Unlike wizards who like nothing better than a complicated hierarchy, witches don’t go in much for the structured approach to career progression. (...) Witches are not by nature gregarious, at least with other witches, and they certainly don’t have leaders. (PRATCHETT, 1989, p.8)

Finally, a wizard’s power is channelled through his staff and hat. They rely more on raw power, but “if you take away the illusions, fireballs and coloured lights, [wizardry] largely consists of persuading the universe to do everything your way” (LEE, 2007, p.245). On the contrary, witches do not resort to any particular object to conduct their power, as it is more subtle and flexible. Witch magic is generally

used to help set events on their appropriate natural motions with the least possible trauma (HANES, 2007, p.418). However, one form of magic is not deemed greater than the other, certainly wizards believe they are superior, but then again so do witches.

By making wizard and witch magic identical in power and importance and removing categories like White and Black magic, Pratchett is clearly trying to promote equality between users of magic, a position not often found in Fantasy fiction. At the end of *Equal Rites* Pratchett shows it is possible for witches and wizards (different as they may be) to work together towards a common goal, in this case to prevent an invasion attempt from the creatures of the Dungeon Dimensions.

Most significantly, Esk, despite Granny's objections since 'women have never been wizards. It's against nature' (PRATCHETT, 1987, p.49), does eventually become a wizard. Likewise, in *The Shepherd's Crown*, young Geoffrey Swivel seems to become a sort of honorary witch, and it is he who will be responsible for keeping a watch on Granny Weatherwax's steading after Tiffany decides to stay on the Chalk. Esk's and Geoffrey's plots, underdeveloped as they are (mainly due to Pratchett's early death), seem to indicate that the lines separating witches and wizards are slowly disappearing from the Disc, which underscores yet again that people's lives ought not be constricted by stories. A woman may become a wizard if she chooses to do so, as can a man become a witch – there may not be any tales about it, but that does not mean you cannot create one. After all that is the power of magic on the Disc, imbedded as it is into the fabric of reality, it can do anything, if only people will believe it can.

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